



The Common Cold

As fall approaches, so does the common cold. Runny nose, cough, body aches, sore throat and watery eyes are all symptoms that you can have with the common cold. This CommonHealth Wellnote will guide you through some strategies that can make you more comfortable and let you know some treatments that don't help.

What is the common cold?

The common cold is caused by a virus and is the most common acute illness in the United States and industrialized world (DeGeorge et al., 2019). So when you get it, you are not alone. The cold virus typically lasts up to 10 days, but length can vary depending on age and health status. If you smoke it will likely last longer. The cold virus is spread by nasal secretions and saliva of infected people [1]. There are many different types of viruses causing the common cold, which means you can catch one after another. So what can be done about this?

Prevention is key!

Washing your hands frequently with soap and water or using hand sanitizer will help your chances of avoiding not only the common cold, but many other illnesses as well. When you wash your hands use hot water (not burning hot) and work soap to a lather for 20 to 30 seconds covering all areas of your hands including jewelry. Regular soap is as effective as antibacterial soap [1].

Some interventions with limited proven effectiveness are ginseng, vitamin C or D, probiotics and water gargles [1]. Antibiotics will NOT help reduce symptoms or duration of the Common Cold.

Treatment Options for Adults:

We are constantly sharing space with others, so we will be exposed. What are our options for treatment?

Ibuprofen (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory) – reduce headache and body ache, sneezing, but have no effect on cough or cold duration.

Decongestants (oral and intranasal) – reduces duration and severity of nasal congestion but have not been proven to reduce cough.

Zinc – has been shown through several studies to relieve cough and nasal discharge if taken within 24 hours of symptoms.

Rest, nutrition and hydration – Your body is working hard to fight off the cold. Drink plenty of water and focus on healthy meals. Give your body time and nutrition to rest, recover and sleep while you are sick.

Source: DeGeorge, K. C., Ring, D. J., & Dalrymple, S. N. (2019). Treatment of the Common Cold. American Family Physician, 100(5), 281–289.

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